2013

Kapsula

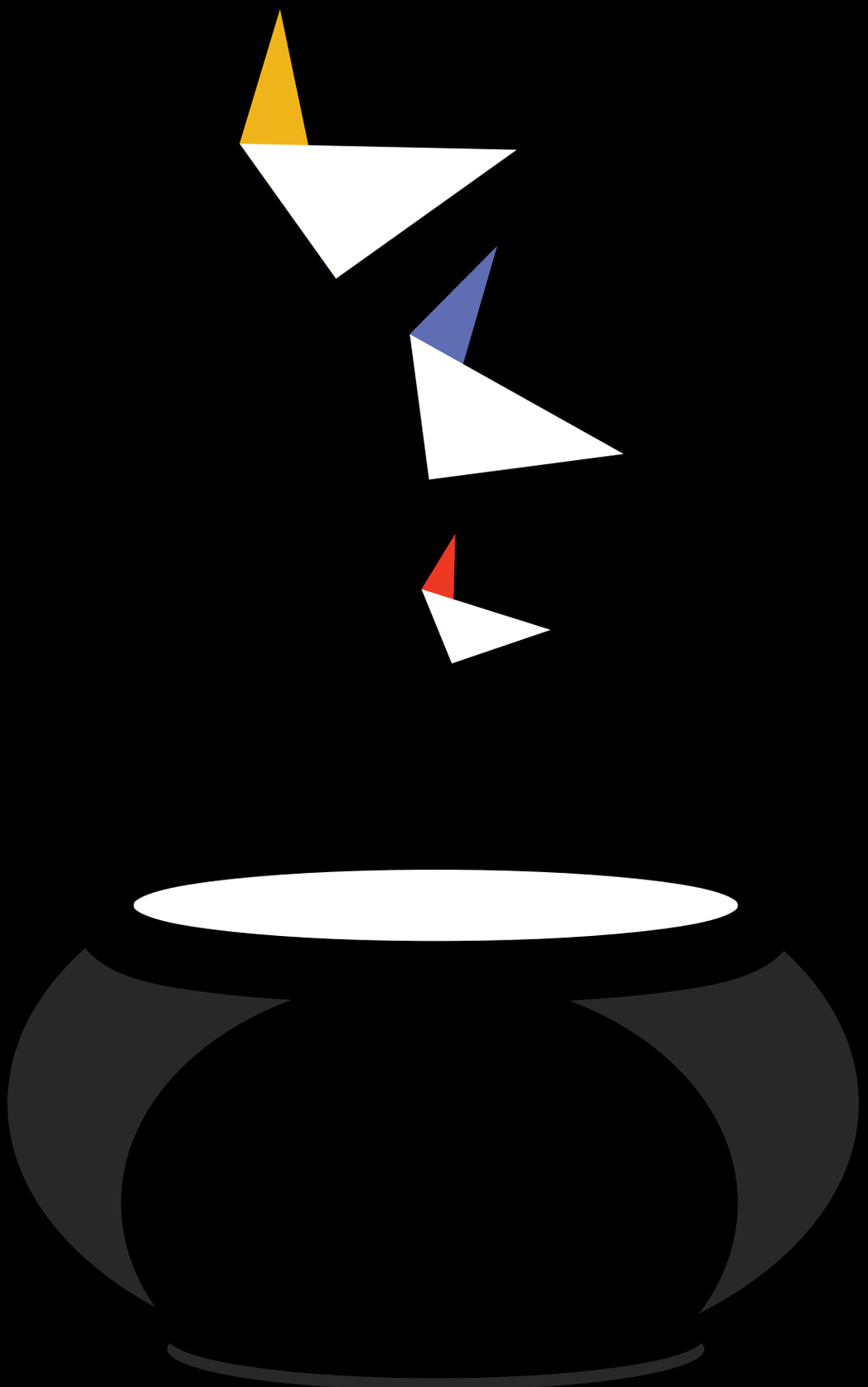
Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Aslanov, Khagan, McNally, Diana and Pearl, Zach

KAPSULA logotype and other headers set in House Gothic Bold number Four. Body copy is set in Garamond Premier Pro and/or ITC Garamond Standard. All text and images published herein are done so with permission of their respective owners. On the Cover, Dimitri Papatheodorou, 2012.02, 2012, Oil on wood 24 in. x 24 in./60.9 cm x 60.9 cm

POLITICS OF AESTHETICS 1.3

KAPSULA

OCTOBER 2013



OCTOBER 2013, VOLUME 1, THEME 2 :
POLITICS OF AESTHETICS, PART 1 OF 3

KAPSULA

Production

EDITOR IN CHIEF / CAOIMHE MORGAN-FEIR
DESIGN / ZACH PEARL
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS / YOLI TERZIYSKA

Contributors

FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS
KHAGAN ASLANOV
DIANA McNALLY

On the Cover

DIMITRI PAPATHEODOROU
2012.02
2012
Oil on wood
24" in. x 24 in./60.9 cm x 60.9 cm

KAPSULA logotype and other headers set in House Gothic Bold number Four.
Body copy is set in Garamond Premier Pro and/or ITC Garamond Standard.

WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT, IN FACT, [THE ARTIST'S] SOCIAL PROTEST SHOWS ITSELF PRINCIPALLY **ON THE LEVEL OF FORM** AND THUS ALIENATION FROM SOCIETY ALSO BECOMES ***ALIENATION FROM TRADITION.***

Renato Poggioli.

The Theory of the Avant-Garde. 1968. pp. 27

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

YOLLTERZIYSKA

A Short Introduction to the Politics of Aesthetics

The Disclaimer

October's monthly gives me the difficult task of writing a cohesive prologue that encapsulates the essence of the following texts in a nicely structured, comparative manner. The goal of this forward, then, is to inform you that this might, in fact, be an impossibility, and that this month's issue promises to be an unlearning and disorienting experience due to the starkly different ways in which Francisco-Fernando Granados, Khagan Aslanov and Diana McNally approach the Politics of Aesthetics.

The Question(ing) of Aesthetics

It should be made clear that KAPSULA is addressing the topic of aesthetics specifically through a questioning of its presence *and* function within contemporary art. After all, aesthetics is an extremely broad yet central discourse to the history and criticism of art, written about and debated extensively since the origins of the Western canon. Its modern contextual origins, however, can perhaps be traced back to Marcel Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain* (1917). With this act, Duchamp posed the critical query: does art need to adhere to the notion of an aesthetic? Are concepts like taste, decorum and beauty even relevant in current times?

Nearly a century has passed since the Armory Show in 1917 when Duchamp submitted *Fountain* to the fair's jury. Since then, the classical way of understanding and experiencing artwork—through visuality—has been undermined by a discursive flow of images and references—plurality and relationality. This new mode of 'looking' at cultural production replaced the importance of craftsmanship and illusionistic representations of reality. It gave artists the freedom to actively engage with current issues, liberated from antiquated confines of visual tradition. That freedom, however, did not come without its fair share of external criticism. The problematic quest to position aesthetics within art continually comes back to the fore. Here, KAPSULA interferes to ask: What then are the implications of taking a stance on aesthetics in contemporary art?

The Politics of Aesthetics 1/3

This month's contributors present their responses to the above from contrasting vantage points. Each addresses the political power of aesthetics to continue provoking the ongoing discussion about its function and significance in contemporary art practice. Granados offers a well-researched academic paper that discusses, among many other topics, a piece by the contemporary Cuban artist, Tania Bruguera. Granados describes the artist's use of the confrontational aesthetic

of performance art to disseminate a complex, political message. Here, we begin to understand aesthetics as a powerful social tool. This active (activist?) approach towards aesthetics is furthered in Aslanov's short story. In this contemporary parable, an aesthetic work in itself, Aslanov problematizes the figure of the artist and the process of art-making through codified banter around a fresh murder-scene. Aslanov's use of swearing and misogyny, that could be read as offensive, illustrate characters and cataclysmic events that carry iconic identities typical of a not-so-distant Western modernist past. His strong language and plot development become a critical discussion of notions of modern and post-modern artistic practice. The interaction between past and present aesthetic practice is further seen in McNally's essay, which questions the aesthetics of contemporary architecture. McNally explores the ability of aesthetics to render a message successfully or, sometimes, poorly. In particular, she focuses on museum architecture, and how these buildings relate to authority and universality, focusing on additions to the façade of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada.

Playing Art Critic (and Emancipated Reader)

The Game:

Granados, Aslanov and McNally utilize three diverse formats of writing, and offer three divergent topics for discussing the given issue. I urge you to draw the links between them for yourselves. These links present themselves as reoccurring concepts*. (*see Strategies).

How to Play:

The works you will read stand as three testimonies that address aesthetics beyond the realm of visuality. They push for an understanding of a condition we find ourselves in that calls for either action, or bleak complacency. As you begin to read this issue, I recommend asking yourself the following questions:

1. What kind of issues is each author addressing? How does it relate to contemporary aesthetics?
2. Do the writers offer a solution?
3. Would the authors get along, considering: their different topics and viewpoints, the aesthetic choices in their written formats and their understanding of aesthetics?

Strategies:

Look for certain key concepts the authors express. Pay attention to the tone of voice each author presents. Our suggestions for key concepts: **identity, death, modernity, post-modernity, action, disturbance, expectation/hope, change, beauty and anti-aesthetics.**

Aim:

Active engagement. Send your answers to **submissions@kapsula.ca** and we will post them.
We want to hear your thoughts as well.

FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, globalization and the legacies of liberation movements have shifted the boundaries of visual culture, expanding its scope and constructing new sites and methodologies for artists to operate in. Performance art, with its debt to the politicized aesthetics of feminism, has emerged as a methodology for art-making that is able to account for the multidimensional coordinates of subjectivity that make intelligible both the individual and the social body. The partial de-centering of modern cultural capitals like New York and Paris that occurred as a by-product of the post-war period leading into the post-modern turn of the 80s and 90s has simultaneously sought out, if often fetishistically, to include the perspectives of 'non-Western' artists. It is within this shifting cultural context that the work of Cuban artist Tania Bruguera has emerged and developed in the transnational art scene.

Bruguera's practice is rooted in performance/body art/action art, but has transitioned away from the ritualistic aesthetics of the physical body into an experimental arena that appropriates political tactics to create manipulated social situations, an aesthetic proposition that she terms **"behaviour art."** Through this approach, the artist engages with the complexities and contradictions that frame the position of the non-European artist in the global art market, refusing the tropes of exoticism while simultaneously participating in and instrumentalizing the art market's institutional frames. Bruguera's project focuses on the re-definition of political practice, a practice she understands as more than a mere representation of political situations. Political art, according to Bruguera, must engender a situation that pushes the audience and the artist out of their traditional complacency. For the artist, this push entails the enactment of a strategy that she terms *self-sabotage*, a space of constant danger where the professional body of the artist is on the line with every intervention into the public sphere. For the audience, participation in a political work of art requires a questioning of the ethics of citizen action, or lack thereof. Throughout this essay, I will provide historical context to the work of Bruguera by tracing the ways in which economic and conceptual global currents like post-modernism, post-colonialism and feminism have created the conditions of possibility for the ways in which she operates today. I will follow the shifts in Bru-

guera's methodology, arriving at a closer analysis of a performance work created for the Venice Biennial in 2009, which uses the possibility of suicide as a tactic perform her manifesto for a new political art.

In terms of my methodology, I am interested in analyzing art historical sources and aesthetic selections from Bruguera's oeuvre through a transnational lens informed by feminist theory. A transnational historiographic intervention into the arena of visual studies allows me to critically account for the ways in which globalization has opened up a space for non-European artists like Bruguera to practice and become successful beyond the borders of their own countries. One of **the aims of transnational history** is to allow for an imagining of the complexities of the so-called "Third World," mapping relationships that do not fall into rigid domination/subjugation/resistance categories and where processes of colonization and nationalization can be imagined as negotiations between players with different kinds of agency. A framework that allows for such complexities is necessary when dealing with an artist like Bruguera, who seeks to problematize, criticize and make spaces across and beyond the hegemonic structures where she willingly participates.

The transposition of the knowledge of transnational historiography into the field of contemporary visual culture allows me to go beyond totalizing representations of Bruguera as either a self-sacrificing hero or as a pawn for the international art market.

Transnational feminism, in particular the recent work of literary critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, plays a crucial role in my approach when analyzing the ways in which Bruguera seeks to create spaces of political agency through her work. Speaking about the trajectory of the figure of the subaltern in her work during a **keynote address** at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2008, Spivak characterized agency as "institutional validation" that is achieved through "the building of infrastructure so that resistance [can] be recognized." I identify a particular relationship between Spivak's definition and Bruguera's project. While the artist is not dealing directly with subalternity per se, she utilizes the institutional validation she has achieved as a means to build infrastructures where voices of resistance and dissent (including but not limited to her own) can be articulated and recognized. While the poetics of Bruguera's project do not specifically claim feminism as a conceptual lineage, her attention to the value of embodied knowledge and her desire to construct public platforms for social debate share a sensibility with poststructuralist and transnational feminist scholarship.

The expanded conceptual and geographical field: ***raced & gendered aesthetics***

Historians of (primarily Western) art have theorized that, with the advent of modernity, the artist and their work have entered an "**expanded field.**" The expansion of the field of the aesthetic throughout the 20th century has been inextricably linked with the rise of **"late capitalism"** and the advent of globalization. This transition can be understood in general terms as a move from the mostly nationalist aesthetics of Modernism found in early to mid-twentieth century avant-garde movements to the border-crossing post-modernist aesthetics characteristic of the post-World War II period, a period that has given rise to what is known now as the international art market. In one of her contributions to the second volume of *Art Since 1900*, theorist Rosalind Krauss discusses the difference between the two main currents of post-modernist art making that first appeared in the 1980s. What she terms as "neoconservative post-modernism" was a stream that capitalized on the fragmentation of grand aesthetic narratives in the service of

an amicable relationship with an elite consumer art market. This neoconservative postmodernism took the form of objects, primarily paintings that could be sold, bought, and auctioned off by art galleries and collected by museums. The continued traffic of the object of art aims to increase its commodity value. At the other end of the spectrum, Krauss historicizes the more progressive "poststructuralist postmodernism" that endeavoured to offer a critical stance on representational practices that searched for "truth" as a final aim while opposing the neutralization of once radical Modernist aesthetics that had become established as the norm. This kind of postmodernism used conceptual approaches, site-specific installation and the bodies of both artist and audience to enact its critical stance. Krauss describes the relationship between these two approaches as asymmetrical given **the political and economic hegemony of late capitalism.** The asymmetrical hegemony of global capitalist culture has engendered the international circuit of art fairs and biennials that utilize spectacle as a means to assign, increase and maintain the commodity value of the artworks that circulate through them.

As the field of art has continued to expand, mostly—though certainly not exclusively—through the conditions set up by global capitalism, the institution of art has also widened its reach. Artist and critic Andrea Fraser argues that the institution of art has come to be both internalized and embodied by artists themselves; a denial of this condition of institutionalization on the part of the artist results, according to Fraser, in a disavowal of responsibility that obscures **"the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship"** that are built into any kind of engagement with the discourse of art. **Fraser believes** the artist is the institution, and that the primary questions they (we) should ask in the face of an always-already institutional framework should focus on what kinds of values and practices are being instituted through our interaction with the system. Fraser proposes a participatory yet critical engagement with the means of production and transmission of contemporary visual culture. Insofar as the artist becomes and remains aware of their institutionalization and co-optation by the global capitalist system that frames them, Fraser infers, they can chose to act strategically and critically as a means to create alternatives within the default frameworks.

The exclusion of racialized artists from outside the Euro-North American art capitals remained, until the middle of the 1980s, as one of the most glaring oversights in the history of art. As the field of visual culture began to expand not only conceptually, but also geographically, major institutions began to think about their relationship with 'non-Western' art. In 1984, the Museum of Modern Art in New York put together "Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Modern and the Tribal," a show of collected works of European and American Modernism presented alongside so-called **"tribal works"** by anonymous authors. Hal Foster appropriately points out the lack of critical engagement on the part of the curators with the **"non-contextual appropriation"** of primarily African and Oceanic aesthetics on the part of 20th century Euro-American Modernists. Five years later, a show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris attempted to address the problematic approach of the 'Primitivism' exhibition. "Les Magiciens de la terre" (Magicians of the Earth) presented the work of a hundred contemporary artists, one half from the West, the other half from the rest of the world. Although 'Magiciens' certainly improved on the un-self-reflexive ethnocentrism of the show at the MoMA five years prior by granting the makers of the works the status of authors, a Eurocentric asymmetry remains in terms of how space was allocated. The 50/50 division between artists from the "West" and artists from the rest of the world maintains not only the fiction of a perfect binary, but also homogenizes anything that is understood as being outside of the scope of Euro-America. "Magicien" or magician, the term used to describe the 'non-Western' artists that are framed through the exhibition, also retains some of the

shamanistic romanticism stereotypically ascribed to racialized cultural producers. While the recognition of the authorship of 'non-Western' artists within cultural institutions ought to be considered a definite advance, the exoticism that still accompanies the contextualization of the work remains an issue that the racialized artist frequently deals with when navigating their professional path.

Another obvious oversight of art history has been the trend towards the erasure of the contribution of female artists from the canon of visual culture. One of the contributions of the wave of feminist art that happened alongside the Women's Liberation Movements from the 60s and 70s was to recuperate a lineage of female artists who had been ignored within the traditional histories of aesthetic movements. Another achievement was the deployment of feminism as a methodological vehicle for a critical engagement with the avant-garde of the post-War period. Peggy Phellan states: "Feminist art emerged from a politically inflected reading of the history of art and a clear-eyed ambition to transform that history by radically questioning its fundamental organizing principles." The ambition to transform the organizing principles of cultural production took shape through practices that extended out from more traditional mediums and began to consider the specificities of time and place that framed this new politicized environment. Beyond the highly necessary role of advocating for the visibility of women within the institution of art, feminist approaches to the making of art began to consider the materiality of the body as a medium for cultural production. According to Phellan, feminism **"put the sentient body at the center of knowing,"** focusing on the sense of touch and thus contesting the long-standing tradition of scopophilia evidenced by the pre-eminence of painting all the way into the second half of the 20th century.

The sentient body becoming a central concern of aesthetic production coincided with the emergence of practices of body art or action art, terms later consolidated under the moniker of 'performance art' by art historian Roselee Goldberg in 1979. Earlier writings about body art by critic Willoughby Sharp defined it as art where the people participating, whether artist or audience, are both **"the subject and the object of the work."** From its emergence, performance art has had a decidedly transnational scope, appearing around the same time in Japan, France, the United States and Austria in the period after World War II. Performance art should thus be interpreted as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of site-specific practices that involve the human body in one way or another as a catalyst for the production of an aesthetic experience.

Bruguera's background: ***From representation to enactment***

Tania Bruguera began her artistic practice in Cuba in 1986 in the midst of the previously described post-modern sweep that globalized the aesthetics and polarized the politics of the art world. This was a year after the death of Ana Mendieta, a highly influential performance artist who fled from Cuba to live in the United States as a child and went on to become one of the pioneers of body-based art. Upon her passing, Bruguera began a 10-year long project where she re-created Mendieta's oeuvre, which dealt directly with the trauma of separation from the homeland, by performing many of her actions inside Cuba, a place where the deceased immigrant artist could never return. Bruguera's personal tribute, the repatriation and representation of Mendieta's work for a Cuban audience was motivated, according to her statements, by the lack of information available to Cuban audiences about the artist. This gesture implicates the relationship between the personal to the political, as it constitutes a critical comment on the conditions that had kept, according to Bruguera, this information from travelling between Cuba and the United States, namely the American embargo and the protectionist cultural policies of Castro's government. In another performance, Bruguera paraded around the streets of Havana dressed up as *Inquisi Conde* a local

personage from the popular imaginary in charge of avenging unfulfilled promises; she was stopped and questioned by police, but was let go when she explained that it was a performance. Unsatisfied with using only her body as part of her pieces and unwilling to limit the interpretation of the work to merely personal statements, she began to incorporate the bodies of other Cubans and images from national history into the work as a way to speak about the collective memory of the island. This shift coincided with the rise of her profile outside of Cuba, as she began to be invited to prestigious exhibitions such as **Documenta 11** in Kassel, Germany in 2002. After this point she decided to take a more confrontational approach within her work.

Autosabotage: ***Re-defining political art***

Bruguera's performance at the 53rd Venice Biennial in June of 2009 sets up and illustrates the theoretical parameters of her proposition for a political art. Exhibitions at the Biennial are usually divided in two categories: national and regional pavilions, traditionally featuring a solo show by an artist chosen by each location's cultural authorities, and a major international group exhibition. The show that featured Bruguera's performance deviated from this traditional format. Curated by Jota Castro and commissioned by Murcia Cultural, a non-profit arts entity from the region of Murcia in Spain, the exhibition entitled "The Fear Society – Pabellón de la Urgencia" (which actually translates from Spanish as "Pavilion of Urgency") featured a group of artists who in one way or another address the subject of fear through their work. Bruguera's contribution was a performance entitled *Autosabotage*. The video documenting the action captures the artist as she sits on chair behind a wooden table in a room in the Arsenale, a medieval weapons storage facility turned exhibition space; on top of the table there is a gun and a bullet. In a conference-like set-up in front of the audience, Bruguera reads a text where she calls for a re-definition of the parameters of political art. Before she places the bullet inside the gun and spins the barrel, she proclaims:

> The responsibility of culture is not to be found in offering survival strategies, but in giving survival a sense [...] More than in an art made [about] politics, I am interested in a politically made art [...]

She points the gun to her head and pulls the trigger.
She shoots a blank and continues reading:

> Artists should self-sabotage within the expectations they have created with their work. They should do likewise with the expectations of previously designed careers in which it seems that artists are small corporation managers [...]
>
> Works of social art should use social time and spectators should leave aside being spectators and become social beings to "see" (it could also be said "to be in") the work. [...] [P]olitical art should deal with ethics and to value this discourse, we should leave the representational world and enter the world of power relationships. Then, aesthetics would rather be the effectiveness of these relationships and beauty would be seen as the moments in which these utopias materialize.
>
> **Political art should stop using references and start creating references.**

Before she points the gun to her head again, one of the organizers of the exhibition comes into the frame and says something to her, likely trying to convince her not to repeat the action. "It's fine... It's fine," she says. She clenches her eyes with the quickness of terror as she shoots another blank, and then points the gun up to the ceiling and the third shot fires the bullet. At this point, shockingly, the audience offers a shy applause. The artist has survived by just one pull of the trigger.

The pairing of the provocative theoretical text with the extreme gesture picked by the artist highlights the seriousness with which Bruguera approaches the project of re-defining the ontology of political art. Her text calls for a definitive shift away from the representation of politics and moves towards the enactment of politics by artists who wish to make their work political. The dangerous possibility of the artist's physical death as a result of the performance dramatizes her call for art that goes beyond simply offering survival strategies within the existing economic structures of the art-world. In the case of *Autosabotage*, Bruguera operates in a politicized manner by refusing to commodify her work. Rather than acting as a "small corporation manager" by making museum-quality objects that can circulate within the art market economy, Bruguera frustrates art-world expectations by choosing to de-materialize her oeuvre and circulate the documentation of the work in the public realm. All that is left after the completion of the performance are the traces of the action, which take the form of verbal and written accounts and digital videos and photographs. This practice stands in stark contrast with the regular circulation of work featured at international art biennials that take pieces in more

traditional mediums like painting and sculpture from an artist's studio to the exhibition space and from the exhibition the exclusive property of a commercial gallery, museum or private collector. It cannot be said that performance art stands completely outside of the art world economy, as it is standard practice for artists to get a fee when they present a live work in the framework of a publicly or privately funded cultural institution. Yet, I would argue, the conceptual and discursive value of critical performance work exceeds (or should in any case aim to exceed) the value of its economic transaction. The value of a piece like *Autosabotage* lies in its ability to reproduce itself after the action has been completed. In this sense, Bruguera acts politically by seeking wide distribution outside the market. The video documentation has been and continues to be made available for free streaming through YouTube, while the text written and read by the artist during the performance has been published online, somewhat bizarrely, through the Vatican Radio website. The circulation of traces of the work through these means maintains a public character, refusing to simply become a commodity that can be collected in the private sphere. Its electronic distribution makes the ephemera of the work widely available to anybody with access to the Internet. While there are certainly limitations to the access provided by the artist, the publicity/publicness of the work is far greater than that of most other works that pass through the Venice Biennial.

A critique of the corporatization of visual culture in the context of the Biennial, a highly corporatized venue, creates a contradiction that parallels the artist's own compromised position as an artist from Cuba with a successful international career. The anti-capitalist rhetoric of her text and the public manner in which she chooses to have the work archived after its completion seems to be informed by the communism of her upbringing. Bruguera thus negotiates the privilege of her position by refusing to exoticize herself for a foreign audience. There is very little to romanticize in her performance: she dangerously inhabits the figure of the radical leftist intellectual, rather than that of the primitive shaman. Instead of bringing any recognizable sign of Cuba that could be understood in Europe as a kind of tourism advertisement, she brings a stern (if admittedly utopian) Marxist analysis. The hyperbolic deployment of the aesthetics of suicide incorporated as part of her daring action aims to bring her point across: the survival of the (professional, if not physical) body of the artist must be at stake whenever they make a political work.

By seeking to make works of art in a political manner, Bruguera admittedly resorts to tactics of manipulation. She states in an interview that her interest lies in transforming the viewers "from **audience to citizen," by " using [them] as a material,"** the way politicians do to push partisan agendas or garner votes. Her aim is instead to activate the art-viewing public by shaking them out of their usual passive role as observers and bringing them into a conceptual space that prompts an intervention into what she calls in the text "real social time." In this sense, the reaction of the audience throughout *Autosabotage* is not successful, as the ethical response that the artist calls for in the face of her potentially violent gesture is never enacted by any of the spectators. There is only one moment near the end of the video when one individual, presumably a curator or somebody involved in the organization of the exhibition, tries to dissuade Bruguera from pointing the gun to her head a second time. Nobody else gets up from their seats to try to intervene. If, as Bruguera suggests, " aesthetics would rather be the effectiveness of [social] relationships and beauty would be seen as the moments in which these utopias materialize," then beauty is never realized in the performance itself, since nobody makes any serious attempt at trying to stop her from potentially committing suicide. Whether due to shock or because of the deeply ingrained passivity that has been built into the expected behaviour of art audiences, everyone remains exactly where they are, at one point even taking pictures of the performance on their cell phones. More disturb-

ingly yet, the audience offers applause(!) as a response when the artist shoots a third time, firing the bullet that could have killed her. The failure of the piece to enact what it theorizes, the absence of the very kind of ethical response that Bruguera delineates and exalts in her writing signals the relevance, the poignancy and the urgency of her intervention. It is impossible to know whether or not the audience knew that Bruguera was in fact using a real gun, but regardless of this, something about the expected role of the viewer in traditional art viewing situations is revealed in the lack of interaction. The call for a materialization of the utopia of an ethical intervention resonates with what Spivak terms elsewhere **in her lecture** as "the possibility of social aesthetics."

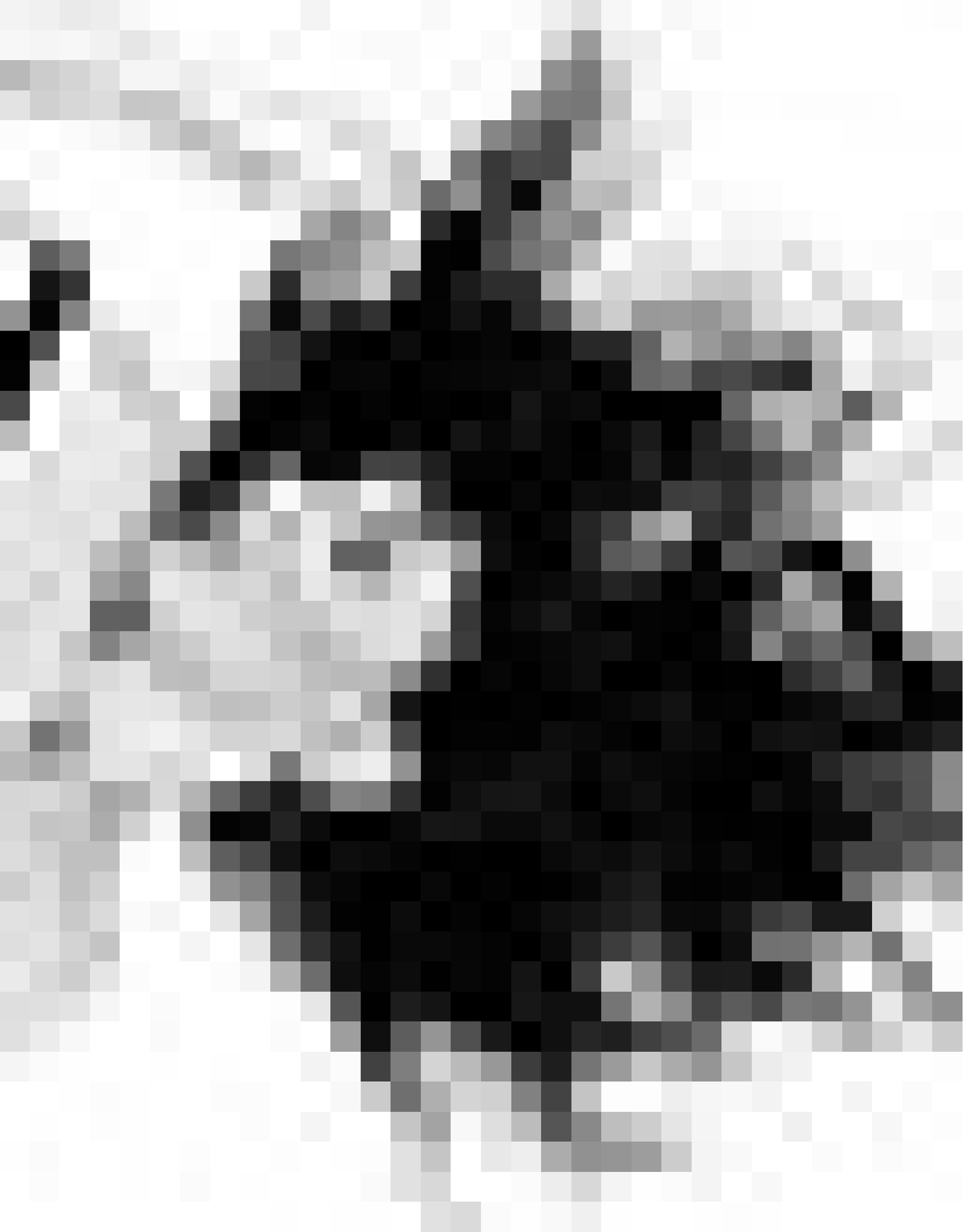
Conclusion

A study of Bruguera's work offers the opportunity to analyze a practice that simultaneously engages with the legacies of a number of recent but urgent discourses in the political and ethical expanded field visual culture. Informed by feminist, postcolonial and Marxist thought, Bruguera labours to push aesthetic experience out of commonly accepted, sanitized institutional frames and into the messy world of power relationships. Her work is in a constant process of compromising the positions of both artist and audience, as it attempts to reframe the power relationships between the two by placing all actors in uncomfortable positions, positions where the decision to act or not act becomes both political and ethical.

Francisco-Fernando Granados

is a Guatemalan-Born, Toronto-based artist primarily focused on making live work. Disillusioned by nationalism, he is happy to be identified as a performance artist. He has presented work in venues including Kulturhuset Stockholm, Ex Teresa Arte Actual (Mexico City), The Hessel Musuem at Bard College, RAPID PULSE (Chicago), the Darling Foundry (Montréal), the Vancouver Art Gallery and LIVE (Vancouver). He is the recipient of a Governor General of Canada's Silver Medal for academic achievement and holds a Masters of Visual Studies from the University of Toronto.

francisco-fernando-granados.blogspot.ca



GUESITA

A SHORT STORY

KHAGAN ASLANOV

We stood around the body, the three of us. Charlie was panting, clenching and unclenching his fists. There was a thin line of drool hanging from the left corner of his lip, pooling in the groove of his collarbone. His wife lay in the kitchen, and we stood around her.

Her right leg was bent at a bad angle. You could tell she was dead from how bad the angle was. She was wearing purple lace panties and nothing else.

Charlie had called us two hours before. When we got to the apartment, he was sitting on the couch in the living room, eating crackers with goat cheese, staring off into the wall, unblinking.

"What now?" he asked grimly.

I looked at Morgan. Morgan was looking at Charlie's wife's tits and licking his lips nervously. He'd fucked her a few times. So have I. Charlie's wife getting around the neighborhood was really how we'd found ourselves in the situation.

I took out my pack and tried to fish out a cigarette. My hands were shaking. None of us were thinking of cops, prison or Charlie's alibi at that moment. We were all thinking about her white legs and how someone who'd sucked all three of us off would never open those golden lips again.

"I won't cut my toenails until you get a job, Charlie boy. Once I start slashing your ankles in bed, maybe you'll get off your ass then."

Morgan looked up finally, his head snapping back viciously, like from a bad dream, closed his eyes for a few seconds, opened and wiped his nose off with his sleeve.

"Stick her in a noose. Tell the cops she hung herself. This is an old place with nice strong beams, none of that new plastic shit."

"There's a hole in her stomach, moron. And what the fuck do you know about ceiling beams anyway?"

Morgan's chin flew up proudly. He had claim as the one of us with the strongest working man sensibilities. He'd worked at a boat yard as a janitor for six weeks once seven years before, which in his mind made him a proper expert on anything from plumbing to carpentry. We were all shitty artists of the lowliest post-modern variety. Writers who didn't write, painters who didn't paint. Though Charlie now had the bluest collar in the room as far as I was concerned. Artists are supposed to croak themselves, not other people, I hear. That had been a decidedly pedestrian move on his part.

Morgan bent down and adjusted her right leg. It was still bad, but I was thankful he did it.

"What now?" Charlie asked again.

I finally managed to light the smoke.

"You could go to the cops, confess. Willful cooperation and all that."

"Cops don't understand people like him," Morgan shook his head. "They'll fry him for killing a woman."

The cigarette tasted rancid. I'd found my bottom as far as smoking went. There was some silver lining there at least. I handed it to Charlie. He took a long pull, muttered a curse and went out of the kitchen. I heard the bathroom's door lock.

"Maybe he'll kill himself," I looked at Morgan. "Solve all our problems."

He smiled flaccidly, then put her leg back the way it was when we came in.

"Accessory bullshit," he muttered to himself.

Every ambulance wail now seemed like the authorities gunning it to where were standing.

"What now really?" he turned to me.

"Have you been painting?"

"Nah. Have you written?"

"Wrote a note to the landlord about getting the laundry room fixed up. Some pretty alliteration there."

Morgan nodded down to her.

"You ever write her anything?"

I felt myself go pale.

"Aw Christ, I have. You think the cops will look to me? Charlie's a fucking weasel. He'll let them think whatever's best for him."

"Forget that. Was it any good?"

"What?"

"The poetry. Was it any good?"

"Yea. She liked it."

"Well shit, that's the proper tragedy here then, huh? Charlie shot a muse."

"He's exactly six good books short of being Burroughs."

"Do we stay?"

"I just want to be forgotten."

"How subversive of you, great writer," he smirked.

"She isn't bleeding much from a belly wound."

"Maybe she's being subversive as well."

"Maybe he'll kill himself," I took a short pace across the kitchen floor, turned to look at Morgan, my hands on my head.

"Forget that. He hasn't written anything great. He doesn't deserve it."

We could have done many things in that situation, I suppose. But I knew already, and Morgan did too, that we would resolve it the same way we did anything. A few pints, a few whiskies, some pot and not much else.

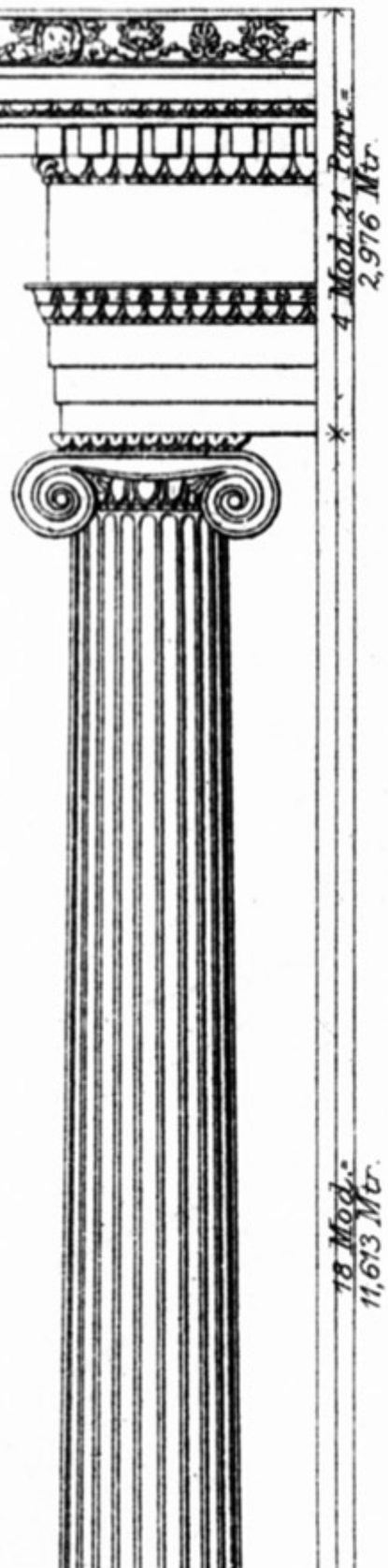
We were artists. We didn't know anything, and even if we did, we wouldn't do anything with it.

Khagan Aslanov

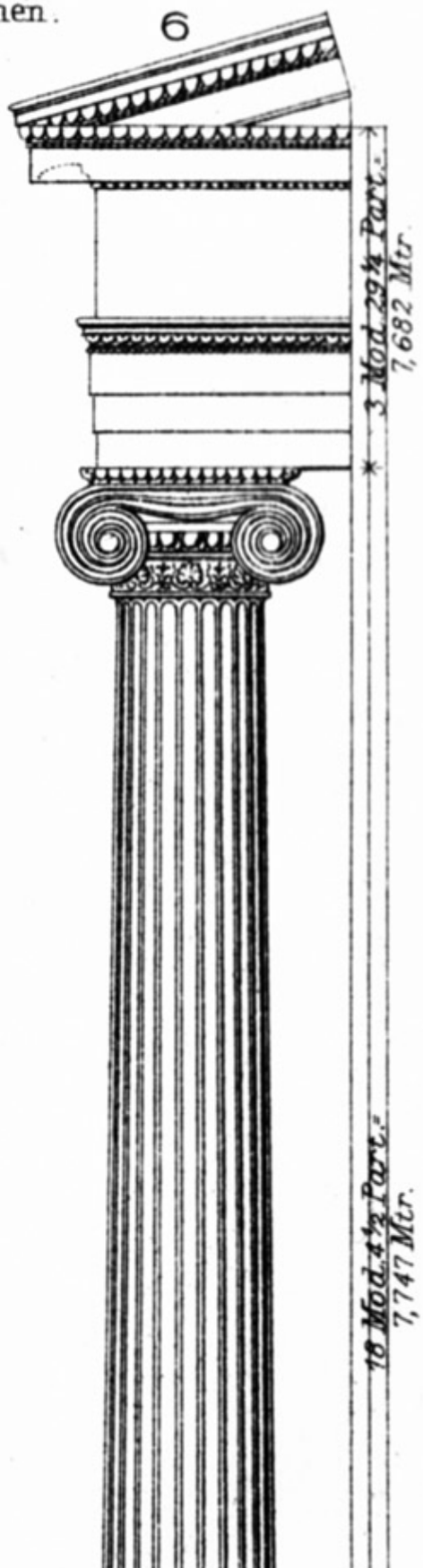
is a writer currently finishing a book.

Kapitäl vom Tempel am Ilissos
zu Athen.

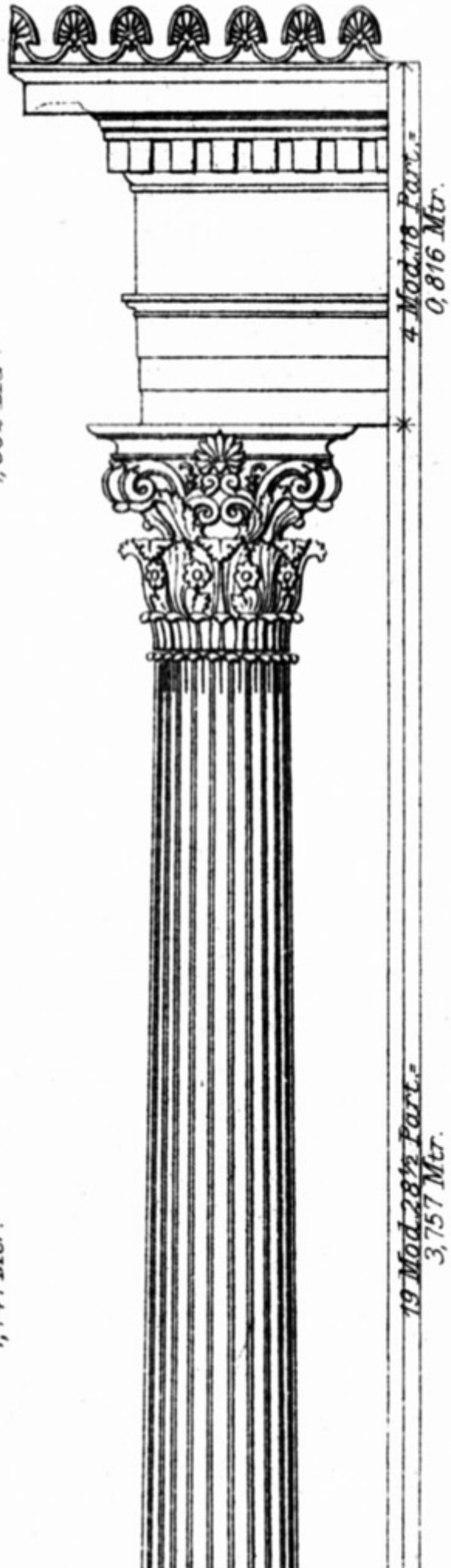
5



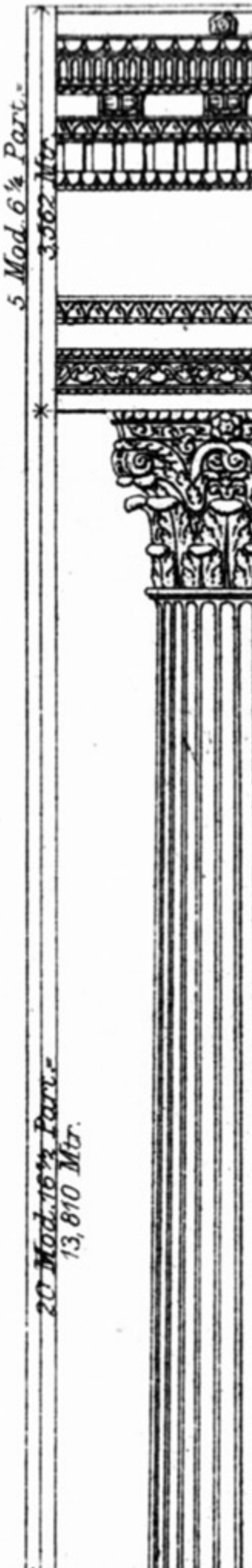
6



7

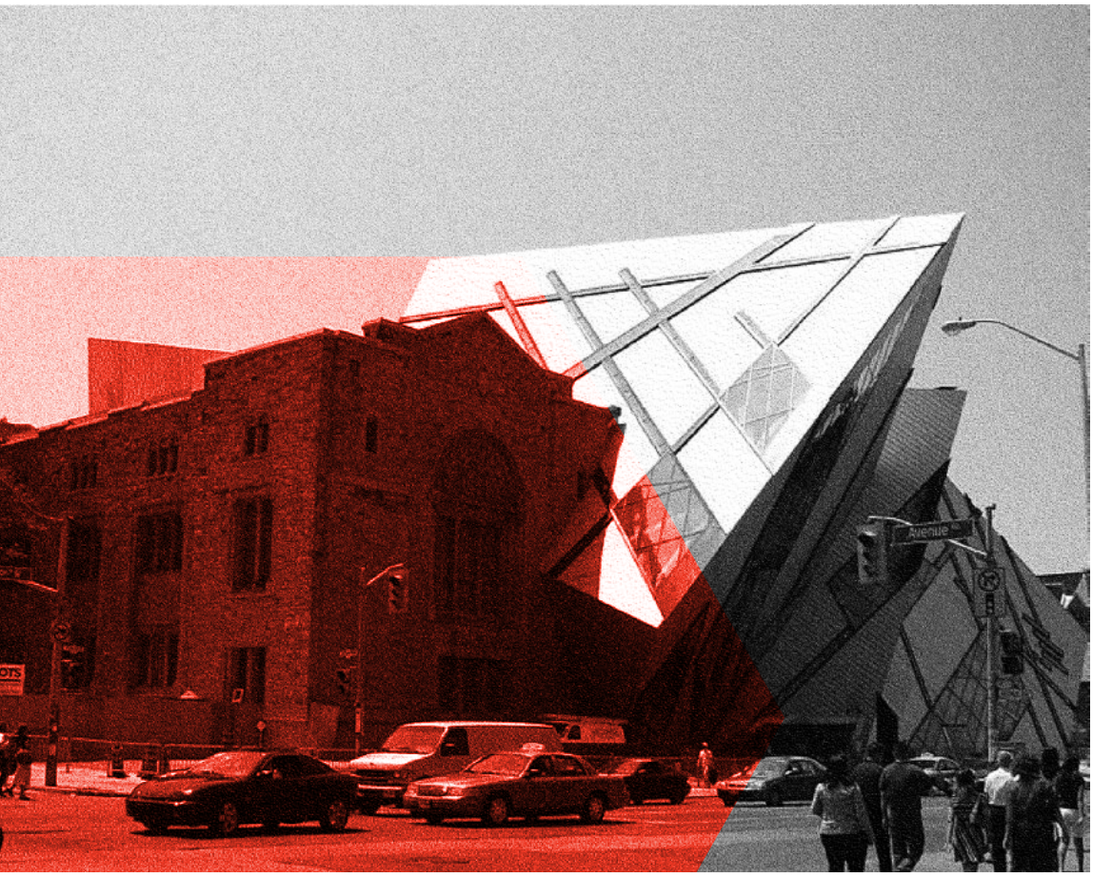


8



DIANA McNALLY

Architectural Dissonance at the R.O.M.



When the Royal Ontario Museum's aging, neo-classical façade was corrupted by the Michael Lee Chin Crystal, the results were mixed—and more than just in terms of casual opinion. Conceived as a pellucid ornament of daring angles and towering apexes, architect Daniel Libeskind's 2007 addition to the building gave jarring, fantastical form to an otherwise stoic institution. Designed with the lofty intention of granting icon status to the museum, the lack of harmony between the former historic architecture and its ahistoric new growth raised the question—of what, exactly, is the R.O.M. an icon? By their prerogative, museums ideally strive to espouse a rational truth, yet the crystal denies any rational interpretation. Its structure, devoid of any right angles and recognizable architectural elements, rejects the ordered nature of the museum.

Instead, it renders the R.O.M. a heterotopia—a counter-site defined by irrationality and unfamiliarity. This disorients both the physical space of the museum as well as its ability to effectively communicate, leaving its audiences to ponder the nature of the museum and its import—if such a thing can even be determined.

Ideally, museums communicate transcendental knowledge about the world. They exist as the stewards of culture through curated collections that serve a greater purpose than their individual contents—namely, the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Both the collections and the character of a museum are consolidated through the institution's mission directive as well as its structural whole. In terms of the former, a directive unifies both internal dynamics and educational prerogatives while manifesting as the taxonomical, chronological and otherwise intellectually digestible ordering of displays. In terms of the latter, the binding power of the museum's architecture provides a sense of unity through physical space. In *Civilizing Rituals: Inside the Public Art Museum*, Carol Duncan posits that the contemporary link between transcendental truth and architecture occurs via the museum. This is evidenced through

the museum's frequent adoption of the architectural tropes of classical-era temples, rendering these institutions as the secular heirs to the religious structures of the ancient world. Certainly the older, neo-classical architecture of the R.O.M. elicits Duncan's notions by including renditions of the pediments, columns and stylobates of ancient Greece. However, the relationship between the two can be seen as more than a mere aesthetic similarity since both the temple and the museum can, according to Duncan, be viewed as ritual sites. While the former exists as the locus of religious revelry, the museum enshrines a "truth that is rational and verifiable . . . [an] 'objective' knowledge" (Duncan 8). The museum also "[enables] individuals . . . to move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspectives," thus rendering it a site of meditation (Duncan 12). The museum is therefore a transcendental realm—one devoted to enlightening its visitors to the rational ideals that it espouses. It is an institution concerned with universal concepts as ameliorated through its cohesive architecture—at once a microcosm of the world, yet also an idealized conception of it.

While Duncan viewed the museum as a transcendental realm both unified and concretized through its architectural space, the disparate structural entities that currently comprise the R.O.M. refuse rational interpretation. By denying a cohesive style, the R.O.M. rejects its quest for unity and truth; instead, it exists as a fragmented entity. In **"Des espaces autres,"** Michel Foucault described the museum under a rubric he deemed the heterotopia—a type of heterogeneous site capable of juxtaposing in a 'single real space' several spaces that are themselves incompatible. He writes,

> In every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality (Foucault 5).

Within the heterotopic museum, "time never stops building up and topping its own summit... [it has an] idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes" (Foucault 7). That is, museums are examples of heterotopias in that they are 'real spaces' capable of ameliorating as well as simultaneously representing all other times and spaces. This brings forth the dual nature of the heterotopia. On the one hand, the author states that such spaces consist of incommensurable worlds. However, because they nevertheless exist in a single space, an order is implicit through that singularity. Foucault states that "the [museum's] idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity" (6). Despite the postmodern notion of the heterotopia, by the author's own admission, the type of order that the museum attempts to impose upon its contents adheres to a Cartesian rationalism. However, what Foucault fails to anticipate is Carol Duncan's subsequent contention that the link between modernity and the heterotopic museum can be traced to its architecture. That is, because these spaces are encapsulated within their architectural skins, their supposedly incommensurable contents are unified and imbued with a superficial order via their façade. Regarding the older structure of the R.O.M., the museum was invested with a classical skin that both shaped and strengthened the interpretation of its contents. As an heir to the religious deference shaped by the temples of antiquity, as well as a shrine to rational ideals, the former incarnation of the museum espoused Duncan's postulations. However,

the Michael Lee Chin Crystal, as an aesthetically divergent addition to the classical façade of the R.O.M., defied these associations and, moreover, exacerbated the derangement of the heterotopia by disordering the museum's space and surface.

In applying the discordance of the heterotopia's contents to its façade, the R.O.M. eradicates its former identity and elicits the uncanny concept of the other. While the historic framework of the former R.O.M. characterized the archetypal museum, and thus the underlying character of such institutions, the application of the crystal disrupts these associations. The physical alteration of the museum necessarily changes its character since the skin encases, and thus conditions, the whole. In the case of the R.O.M., the revised character posited by Libeskind's addition defies logic. According to the architect, the supposed inspiration for the R.O.M. proposal derived from the crystals contained within the museum's geological collections (Browne 27). However, these geological specimens are by no means the defining element of the institution's collections or nature. By designing an architectural skin for the museum inspired by a false pretense, Libeskind has created an alienating condition for the institution. Through the crystal, the R.O.M. is transformed from the museum familiar into the museum strange. This transformation can be viewed as a type of otherness—an estrangement not only with the museum in an architectural sense, but also in terms of its shift in character and content.

In constituting the R.O.M. as other, Libeskind necessarily reflects otherness as conceived by both Emmanuel Levinas and subsequently Jacques Derrida. Levinas, who concerned himself primarily with modernism and ethics, posited otherness as that which resists knowledge as well as every attempt to either thematise or capture that alterity. However, this notion of absolute difference elucidates that the concept itself is unrecognizable. Derrida, Levinas' postmodern heir, proclaimed a more pragmatic solution to the concept of the other, leaning toward what his precursor would deem an "imperialism of the same" (Gennochio 37). That is, Derrida suggests that we frame what is considered to be other, or that which is outside of ourselves, through the tropes of familiarity, or what we already know. In this way we can construct a working knowledge of the world beyond our own physical binds (Gennochio 40). In the Levinsian conception, this would be impossible: we could only ever know ourselves. Yet, it can be demonstrated that, amongst other factors, a building's architecture provides a familiar context through which the museum can communicate and educate its visitors about unfamiliar content. Indeed, the former, familiar structure of the R.O.M. provided a rationalizing context for the heterogeneous contents within. However, this familiarity has been eroded through the application of the crystal to the museum. The addition of this structure has effaced the R.O.M.'s familiarity and rendered it closer to a Levinasian conception of otherness as well as a more apt embodiment of Foucault's dire vision of the heterotopia. Thus the R.O.M., in being remodeled, has diminished its ability to effectively communicate to its audiences in the way that it once had. While there is no ability for the museum to fully inhabit the impossibility of the Levinasian model, its discordant façade has exacerbated both its heterotopic qualities and its otherness.

Through the crystal, the R.O.M has become alienated from itself, and so have we as its patrons. Its discordant addition has corroded the identity of the museum, obscuring its ability to communicate truth by splintering all aspects of time, space, character, content and familiarity. If the crystal was designed to enhance the status of the museum as an architectural icon, it seems to signify nothing more than disorder

and confusion. With its authority over knowledge undermined by its structural parasite, one must wonder —can the strength of its contents be reconciled with the novelty of its form? Although Libeskind's addition has clung to its foundation for the past six years, it still raises questions as to what takes precedence: the crystal or the museum itself—collections, character and communicative authority included? As an entity devoted to a rational cause housed within an irrational, heterotopic building, one can only hope that this dichotomy will prove benign, lest the museum become as inert as the crystals by which it was inspired.

Diana McNally

pursues a polymathic lifestyle as a graphic designer, illustrator, artist, writer, DJ and instructor at both Ryerson University and Centennial College. Her intellectual preoccupation lies with architectural theory and the unheimlich. Inexplicably, she can also be seen on-screen opposite Channing Tatum in The Vow (2012).